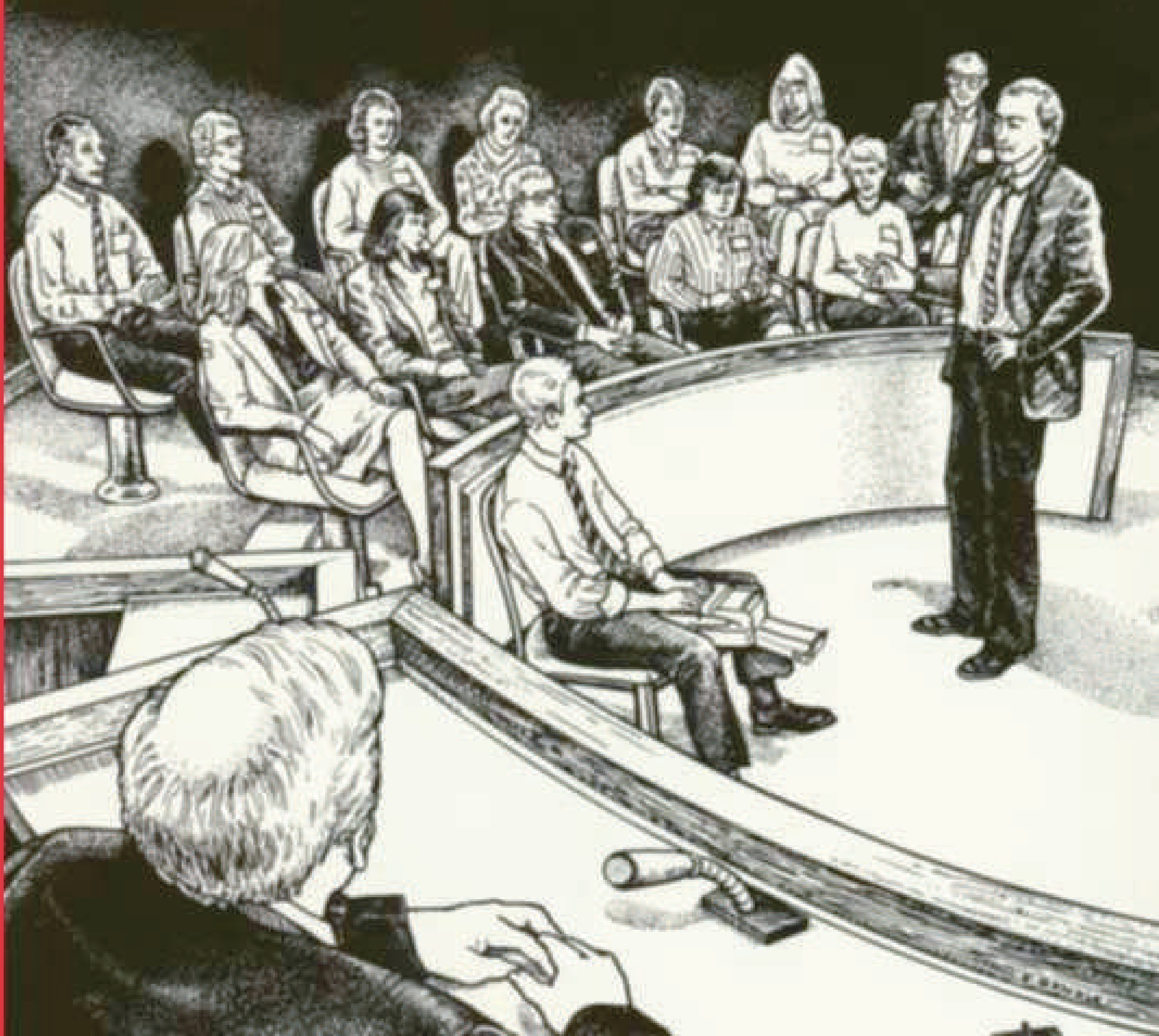
Faith and Reason

by Dick Sztanyo



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The exact relationship between faith and reason has consistently been a battleground within Christendom. From near the beginning of Christianity, there have been serious reflections on this topic. Why then, one may ask, is yet another essay being offered on the subject? I would like to offer at least three reasons for the present volume.

First, there always is a need for a study of **biblical** faith. Many of the studies on this subject, I believe, have ignored important biblical evidence—evidence that will be presented and discussed in this book. Since ultimately the question is, "What does the Bible teach about faith and reason?," one must not divorce his reflections from a biblical foundation. Unfortunately, this has occurred in far too many cases.

Second, there is a need for this study, if for no other reason, because of the increasing prevalence of agnosticism within the confines of Christendom. Admittedly, this is a serious charge, yet it is one that can be documented in literally hundreds of cases—some of which will be mentioned in the body of this work. There are those who simplistically assert, "Where there is knowledge, there is no longer any room for faith." Such a statement is a perversion of plain biblical teaching. Still others have surrendered any claim to a foundation of evidence for faith.

Some years ago, a seminar was conducted in Dallas, Texas, in which a "debate" occurred between world-renowned atheists and theists trained in the empirical sciences, social sciences, and philosophy. The philosophy panel was represented by Paul Kurtz, Antony Flew, Wallace I. Matson, and Kai Nielsen on the atheists' side, and Alvin Plantinga, W.P. Alston, George Mavrodes, and Ralph McInerny on the theists' side. The theists were to defend God's existence against the challenge of the atheists. I listened in shocked amazement as theists Plantinga and Alston actually urged rejection of the law of rationality, which states that "one should draw only such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence" (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 and Isaiah 41:21). The astonishing thing was that these men spent an inordinate amount of time **giving evidence** for their conclusion that one should reject the law of rationality—a position that is hopelessly self-contradictory. They "reasoned" that one should reject reason with reference to the question of God! And this was how they hoped to defend God against the attacks of those who challenged His existence? Since these men are some of the heavyweights in the academic community, this was disheartening, to say the least.

Third, of course, there is a need to study and understand biblical faith because of the consistent challenge to Christianity from the atheistic camp. In his book, *Atheism: The Case Against God*, George Smith wrote: "The conflict between Christian theism and atheism is fundamentally a conflict between faith and reason. This, in epistemological terms, is the essence of the controversy. Reason and faith are opposites, two mutually exclusive terms: there is no reconciliation or common ground" (1979, p. 5). Smith summarized his claim by saying: "It is logically impossible to reconcile reason and faith" (p. 101). At least one of my motives for publishing this treatise is to demonstrate that Smith's position is completely false. We are not required to flee into the land of irrationality in order to escape the challenge of the skeptic. My desire is that the reader will come to this same conclusion through a study of the material made available in this volume. The conclusions drawn from the various arguments presented here become our shared responsibility. I am traveling the road of reflection regarding the faith/reason controversy; I now bid you to accompany me on the journey. [NOTE: For additional information on this subject, see Sztanyo, 1983, pp. 472-483; 1983, 14[4]:41-44; 1985, pp. 164-171; 1986, pp. 197-216.]

CHAPTER 2

THE CONCEPT OF "RATIONAL BELIEF"

There are two extremes that must be avoided, whether in a study and presentation of Christian apologetics or in a Christian's daily life: (1) the use of **reason alone**; and (2) the use of **revelation alone**. In practical terms, this is not a situation of "either/or" but "both/and." The proper relationship should be that of reason **and** revelation. Though many religionists posit some sort of separation between faith and reason, I argue that such is not the case. Faith and reason are to be distinguished, but never separated. To illustrate this, consider the relationship of the mind and body. The body is not the mind, nor is the mind the body. Yet they are inseparably joined in this present mode of existence. Therefore, the mind and the body can be, and ought to be, distinguished, but not separated. In a similar way, faith and reason are distinct, but not separate. Both are essential to Christianity, though each must function within its proper sphere. Faith is primarily an act of both the intellect and the will, whereas reason is essentially an act of the intellect.

BIBLICAL FAITH

The word family of *pistis* and *pisteuo* in Scripture is related to the term *peitho*. These three words are used 244, 248, and 55 times, respectively, in the Bible. The verb *pisteuo* primarily has reference to the act of faith, while the noun form more clearly depicts what faith means. Liddell and Scott define the noun as follows: "a means of persuasion, an argument, proof" (1869, pp. 1272-1273). *Peitho*, in the active voice, means "to be fully persuaded, believe, trust: of things, to be believed" (1869, p. 1220). At the very least, the terms imply a prior understanding (i.e., knowledge) of what is to be believed or trusted. In other words, faith is based upon a foundation of knowledge. Moreover, faith can lead to a greater expression of knowledge.

Faith is used in Scripture in a general way to refer to those things both supernaturally and naturally revealed by God (cf. Hebrews 11:1,3,6, Psalm 19:1-14, Romans 1:18-22, and 10:9-17). Scripture records at least seven different ways in which the term "faith" is used, five of which (the first five in my listing) play an indispensable role in man's salvation. First, faith is used to designate "belief" (John l2:42; Hebrews 11:6). Second, faith sometimes means "trust" (John 14:1; Romans 4:17-20; Luke 7). Third, faith often refers to "obedience" (Numbers 20:12; John 3:36, ASV; Hebrews 10:39; Romans 1:5,8; 16:25-26). Fourth, faith frequently refers to steadfastness, loyalty, or "faithfulness" (Habakkuk 2:4; Galatians 3:9; Hebrews 10: 23,38; Revelation 2:10). Fifth, the word is used objectively to refer to the content of faith, hence, "the faith" (Romans 10:9; Jude 3; Galatians 1:11,23). Sixth, at times faith is used of strong personal conviction (Romans 14:2,23). Seventh, faith also is used on occasion to speak of a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:8-9; Matthew 17:20, 1 Corinthians 13:2). While faith sometimes is contrasted with sight (2 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11:1; cf. John 20:29 for an exception), doubt (James 1:6; cf. also Matthew 14:3 and 21:21), and deeds of the law (Romans 3:28; Galatians 3:2-5), it never is contrasted with knowledge so as to imply a separation.

In John's Gospel, *pisteuo* with the dative is employed frequently (John 2:22; 5:46; 8:31-47). With regard to the nature, mission, and role of Jesus, John utilized *pisteuo* with a *hoti* clause, as in John 8:24 ("be convinced that I am"), John 20:31 ("be convinced that Jesus is the Christ"), as well as several other passages (see John 13:19, 14:11, and 17:8). *Pistis* (belief) here is close to *gnosis* (knowledge), as in John 6:69: "...we have **believed** and have **known** that you are the holy one of God." Both faith and knowledge are concerned with the fact that the Father sent Jesus (faith—John 11:42; 17:8,21; knowledge—John 17:3). Both faith (John 16:27-30) and knowledge (John 7:17) realize that He and His teaching are from the Father. If knowledge relates to the truth (John 8:32), faith relates no less to Him who is the Truth (John 14:1,6). The fact that He is the Christ is an object of faith (John 11:27; 20:31), but it is also an object of both faith and knowledge together (John 6:69).

Scripture refers to itself as having been written to produce both faith (John 20:30-31) and knowledge (1 John 5:13). Furthermore, there are numerous passages in which faith and knowledge materially pertain to the same object at the same time and under the same aspect (see 1 Timothy 4:3, 2 Timothy 1:12, John

4:42, 6:69, 17:8, 1 John 4:6,16, and 5:13). Moreover, the apostles used a variety of types of evidence to lead men to a commitment to Christ. For instance, in Acts 2:14-40, Peter used eyewitness testimony (see John 4:39), the miracles of Christ (see John 20:30-31), and predictive prophecy (see Isaiah 41:21ff.). Indirect credible testimony is also a predominant line of evidence leading to faith (see Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:3, 2.36, 9:22, and 13:38). Thus, **faith often is portrayed biblically as knowledge based upon testimony**.

Though this issue will be addressed more thoroughly later in this study, I already have said enough to advance the following thesis: Any concept of faith that severs it from its objective, epistemological base (foundation of knowledge) is at variance with biblical teaching. Biblically speaking, one does not believe that God is (or any other item to be accepted "by faith"): (1) against the evidence; (2) without evidence; or (3) beyond the evidence. Rather, one believes on the basis of evidence sufficient to establish the conclusion (1 Thessalonians 5:21; Isaiah 41:21).

Biblical faith is built upon a prior understanding (knowledge) of what is to be believed. Information regarding "saving faith" (i.e., what one must do to be saved) comes only from special revelation (i.e., Scripture—Romans 10:17; John 6:44-45). But there is another type of faith that is derived from general revelation (i.e., nature—Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:19-22; Hebrews 11:3,6; et al.). Later in this book, when I speak of proving the existence of God, I shall be speaking primarily about this second type of faith. I hope to make clear that such a faith is built and based upon evidence—that is, it is "rational belief." I intend to make clear that I am opposed to every notion of faith that is **ir**rational.

ARRIVING AT KNOWLEDGE

I cannot survey in this limited space the various words from the Greek text translated "know" in the Scriptures (there are several). I will, however, examine numerous ways of coming to knowledge as revealed in the Bible. In short, I will be examining the types of evidence that can be used to prove one's case. I argue that the term "proof" cannot be limited to what is seen, felt, heard, tasted, or smelled (i.e., concerning only empirical evidence). What, then, are legitimate means of coming to knowledge?

1. There is **induction**, which is simply a "gathering together" of available evidence.

2. There is **deduction** (Scripture abounds with examples), which is the marshaling of evidence in such a way that conclusive results can be obtained (see Mark 3:4, et al.).

3. There is the use of **empirical data** (see Luke 12:54-56), which is simply a direct experiencing of an object (for instance, a door) or an event (such as the weather outside).

4. There is **credible testimony** (see John 20:25-31, 1 Peter 1:8-11, 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, et al.), which is testimony from witnesses who either are known to be trustworthy, or whose testimony cannot be justifiably doubted.

5. There is **intuition** (see Matthew 12:24-28), which must be distinguished from a mere hunch or guess (the usual modern understanding of this word). By intuition, I mean a knowledge that does not depend in any way on sense perception or empirical experience. It is evident immediately, even though it may require some effort to grasp. The passage alluded to above is an example in Scripture of such. It is intuitively absurd to suppose that Jesus would cast out Satan's coworkers by using Satanic power. Other examples include the metaphysical **principle of non-contradiction** ("a thing cannot both exist and not exist at the same time and in the same sense"), and the logical **law of contradiction** (derived from the metaphysical principle) which states that "contradictory statements cannot both be true." These principles are known immediately and with absolute certainty. Any attempt to deny them, in fact, presupposes them (i.e., if you deny either principle, then your denial is either true or false; it cannot be both true and false). And this knowledge does not depend upon even a single empirical observation. For instance, these principles hold true for the Universe as a whole, and even for God Himself. I know with certainty that God cannot both exist and not exist at the same time and in the same sense. He either exists or He does not. Empirical observation is worthless here. Yet this is a legitimate pathway to knowledge.

6. There is **metaphysical deduction**, a term that I have coined to refer to a deduction made **from** things that can be observed **to** things that potentially may never be seen (see Luke 17: 20-21 and Hebrews 11:3). Robinson Crusoe (so the story goes) was marooned on an island. While walking on a beach, he discovered a footprint in the sand that clearly was not his own. He deduced accurately: (1) that there was another being on the island; and (2) that this other being was a human being. If he had never seen "Fri-

day" face to face, the certainty of his knowledge nevertheless was not jeopardized. This same concept relates to the arguments for God's existence. God has left His "footprints," as it were, throughout the Universe (note Acts 14:17: "Yet he left not himself without witness..."). Naturally, each person is responsible for reasoning properly and for drawing correct conclusions from the available evidence (Romans 1:19-22; Psalm 19:1-6; Hebrews 3:4; et al.).

There is nothing, in or out of Scripture, to suggest that only **one** of these ways of arriving at truth results in "proof," while every other means is denied such a status. One may prove his case using any, or all, of these legitimate means of coming to knowledge (so long as the limits of each method are understood). It has become apparent that many today hold that "knowledge" or "proof" is restricted to scientific investigation alone, and that whatever is not "scientific" then is designated as "faith." Such a dichotomy accounts for the strange things one reads on the subject of faith and knowledge. One author suggested, for example: "Scientific knowledge we know, and things seen we know, but faith is the assurance of what we accept that we do not yet know but are hoping for" (Thomas, 1974, p. 137). This position agrees with that of philosopher Bertrand Russell, who said: "Whatever knowledge is attainable, must be attained by scientific methods; and what science cannot discover, mankind cannot know" (1935, p. 243). Such a position is patently false, because it disregards other important means of arriving at a knowledge of the truth.

CHAPTER 3

MODERN NOTIONS OF FAITH

In the previous chapter, we surveyed several ways of arriving at a knowledge of the truth, none of which can be called the sole measure of "proof" (i.e., one may prove his case using any or all such approaches). It is unfortunate that legitimate means of arriving at knowledge often are not recognized by many who speak or write on Christian apologetics. Antony Flew, though an atheist, correctly observed that for the average person today, "'You cannot prove the existence of God' has become a catch-phrase" (1966, p. 19). If one asks, "What difference does all this make anyway?," Flew answers: "For the committed Christian what is at issue is the **rationality** of the commitment" (1966, p. 19, emp. added). In other words, the difference is the **believability** and **defensibility** of the gospel, as well as the rationality of a Christian's personal convictions. In short, it makes all the difference in the world.

In this chapter, I shall attempt to document two things: (1) the philosophic background of modern concepts of faith and reason; and (2) how these concepts have affected, and are affecting, the church.

Numerous influences contributed to the modern concept of "faith." For example, Immanuel Kant prefaced the second edition of his famous *Critique of Pure Reason* with these words: "I have therefore found it necessary to deny **knowledge** in order to make room for **faith**" (1965, B:XXX). The Danish philosopher and theologian, Søren Kierkegaard, maintained that the absolute limit to which our reason repeatedly is drawn, but cannot penetrate, is the Unknown, which he suggested we call "God" (1936, Chapter 2). In other words, human reason has reached its limit. Therefore, one must let go of his rationality in order to make a "passionate commitment" to God through faith (i.e., one must take a "leap of faith" beyond all categories of knowledge and reason). Faith in God (for Kierkegaard) was grounded neither rationally nor empirically; so the existence of God is neither rationally certain nor empirically evident.

In his book, *The Will to Believe* (1903), William James held that men must believe something out of psychological necessity. Something offered for our belief is a **hypothesis**. If we label a decision made from various hypotheses an **option**, then our options may be of several kinds: (1) living or dead; (2) forced or avoidable; and (3) momentous or trivial. James suggested that a genuine option is of the forced, living, and momentous kind. The "religious hypothesis" is chosen on the basis of the greatest "cash value" (a term he used often in his essays), in spite of the fact that such questions cannot be decided intellectually at all. Rather than remaining agnostic, James proposed that one choose to believe in God, since it seems to be the better risk (see also Pascal's *Pensées*). In his essay, *The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life* (1903), James argued that one should live "as if" God exists because this forces one to live a more strenuous moral life. No one can **know** that God exists, said James, but in order to live the best type of moral life, we must live **as though we do know** that He exists.

After Kant, many thinkers not only distinguished faith and reason, but also **separated** them. Faith and reason were thought to occupy two entirely different spheres. One could speak of faith in terms of probability, mystical experience, suprarationality, irrationality, being "beyond knowledge," etc., but certainly not as a form of knowledge. This assumption became so influential and prominent that members of the body of Christ began to advocate it as being the truth. This no doubt helps explain the following astonishing statements. "In all matters of religious epistemology we come to the question of distinguishing between absolutely provable knowledge and that which is faith-dependent to some degree or other.... In other words, men of strong faith 'act like' they have absolute knowledge, even though in this life they can never have more than a strong faith" (Thomas, 1974, pp. 131-132). "Absolute, final knowledge beyond which there can be no greater, would not leave room for faith. One of Webster's definitions of faith is, 'firm belief in something for which there is no proof.' ...We act as though we have as much certainty as the apostles had. This is real faith" (Thomas, 1982). "If you ask me, 'Can you absolutely prove the existence of God?,' I have to answer, 'No.' No one can positively prove God.... He cannot be positively and scientifically proved in the same way more ordinary things are proved" (Barnett, 1980). "...[T]he existence of God...cannot be proved in a final absolute sense. After all, there must be room for faith if we are free beings. The choice between belief and unbelief hinges on the strength of evidence for and against.... We confidently believe the weight of evidence lies firmly with belief" (Gilbert, 1971, pp. 8-9).

The positions espoused by these writers regarding "rational belief" more closely resemble the positions maintained by Kant, James, Kierkegaard, and Russell than the position maintained by Peter, Paul, and John. It may be that some have espoused an agnostic position inadvertently, but the position is agnostic nevertheless. To admit that Christianity is "only probable" is to admit the possibility that, in fact, it might be a hoax! Could you—in your most irrational moment—imagine even the slightest possibility of an apostle preaching the "God of probability" or the "God who may be"? I would like to close this chapter with a challenge from the pen of Clark Pinnock:

> We must give reasons for our belief that the gospel is a revelation from God and not a human construction or **people will not take it seriously if not disposed to do so already**.... Loud rhetorical assertions that God is "really" out there are not going to substitute for an intellectually solid theology that backs up its faith with works. Evidence has to be forthcoming to validate the confidence that God is not made in man's image but is the Lord and Savior of mankind (1982, emp. added).

CHAPTER 4

THE PHILOSOPHIC POSITION ON "RATIONAL BELIEF"

In his book, *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*, Walter Kaufmann, who certainly is no friend of Christianity, attempted to answer the question, "Why do men believe as they do?," and suggested at least seven distinct causes of belief (1961, pp. 132-134). In spite of his hostility to Christianity, his list is quite comprehensive. I would like to summarize it here, without making lengthy remarks.

Any statement (such as "God exists," or "Jesus established only one church," or "baptism is essential for the salvation of one's soul") may be believed because: (1) arguments have been (or can be) offered in its support; (2) it was encountered (in a book, paper, etc.) and nothing was spoken against it; (3) numerous factors may be working in its behalf (it may be a common belief in one's cultural environment and thereby be accepted by a sort of "osmosis"); (4) the new belief fits well with our prior beliefs; (5) there may be penalties for not accepting a belief (e.g., social ostracism, disappointment to our parents, torture, etc.); (6) there may be positive rewards for accepting such a belief; and (7) the belief may be accepted because it gratifies us or answers a psychological need.

There is a distinct difference between the first belief and the other six. Given the totality of biblical teaching, it is clear that God accepts only the first (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:15). Beliefs may be divided into two categories, based upon the nature of their causes. There are **rational** beliefs and **irrational** beliefs. Rational belief is reasoned belief based upon evidence. Irrational beliefs may be divided into two subcategories: (1) beliefs not produced by a "reason," as such, but by some non-rational cause such as emotion, prejudice, vested interest, authority, habit, and the tendency to merely accept what one is told; and (2) beliefs produced by inadequate or insufficient reasons.

In this treatise, I am defending what has come to be known as the "law of rationality," which was formulated quite accurately by Lionel Ruby in his text, *Logic: An Introduction*:

> Every person who is interested in logical thinking accepts what we shall call the "law of rationality," which may be stated as follows: **We ought to justify our conclusions by adequate evidence**.... By "adequate evidence" we mean evidence which is good and sufficient in terms of the kind of proof which is required. There are occasions when we require conclusive proof, as in mathematics, and there are occasions when it is sufficient to establish the probability of a given conclusion, as in weather prediction. But in all cases the evidence must be adequate to its purpose (1960, p. 131, emp. added).

Before I enter into a discussion of the biblical position, I want to insist that there is not a single item in Christianity, upon which our souls' salvation depends, that is only "probably" true. In each case, the evidence supplied is sufficient to establish conclusive proof regarding the truth of the Christian faith. This is not to say, however, that such a case is psychologically compelling, so that one could not reject the evidence. That would be an abuse of free will. I do argue, however, that one can be absolutely certain (intellectually) of such matters as the existence of God, the deity of Christ, the inspiration of the Bible, etc. That this also is the biblical position is the subject of the remainder of this investigation

CHAPTER 5

THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON "RATIONAL BELIEF"

In this chapter, it is my intention to discuss briefly the importance of rational belief in Christianity, and its relevance to the Christian system. In doing so, I would like to examine some key passages on this particular issue.

1 Peter 3:15. In this text, Peter calls upon all Christians to be "ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you." The Greek term *apologia* ("give answer" or "make defense") followed by a dative (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:3) has reference to any kind of answer or justification, whether formal (e.g., before a judge), or informal (e.g., in a routine discussion). Peter's use of the phrase, "every man," makes clear that our *apologia* is intended to be most often the latter of these two (although that would certainly not exclude the former). *Logon aitein* ("to ask a reason" or "to request a rational account of") refers to the fact that every civilized man was expected by the Greeks to be prepared to discuss questions of opinion or conduct rationally and temperately—i.e., to give and receive a reason or justification. Peter laid this obligation of "rational belief" upon every child of God. Christians must "make defense" by giving "a rational account of" the hope they have in God, Christ, the Word of God, the church, etc.

1 Thessalonians 5:21. When Paul urged Christians to "prove all things" (literally, "put all things to the test"), he certainly did not have in mind the notion of belief beyond the evidence, in spite of the evidence, or in opposition to the evidence. Neither was he arguing that faith is merely a matter of probability. Likewise, he did not mean that Christians are to: (a) act "as if" their case has been proved; or (b) believe in something for which there is no proof. Rather, the use of the term *dokimazo* elsewhere in the New Testament makes clear that Paul intended Christians to "prove" or "put to the test" **all things**, including the existence of God (see Luke 14:19, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 16:3, 2 Corinthians 8:8, 1 Thessalonians 2:4, 5:21, 1 Timothy 3:10, 1 Peter 1:7, and 1 John 4:1). Indeed, within Scripture, a special nobility is ascribed to reason when employed in such a fashion (Acts 17:11).

Philippians 1:7. The term "confirmation" (from *bebaiosis*) is used in such a way in Scripture as to make clear that a **justification** of the position espoused is intended (see Mark 16:20, Hebrews 2:3, 6:16-17, et al.). Peter used this term twice to illustrate a position confirmed or "made more sure" by virtue of the evidence (2 Peter 1:10,19). The first text speaks of the fact that one's fidelity toward, and standing before, God is evidenced by the type of life one leads. The second passage refers to the fact that fulfillment of prophecy evinces divine omniscience, for there is no other possible explanation for fulfilled prophecy. In his book, *Evidences of Christianity*, William Paley stated:

> ...our Translators [KJV—DS] did not well understand the force of the Greek article; an attention to which will clearly show the true sense of the Original, which is, "We have the Word of Prophecy more sure;" i.e. made, by the **fulfillment** of it, more clear than when it was uttered (1952, p. 218, capitalization and emp. in orig.).

Isaiah 41:21. This passage—in the context of a test between the one true God and the false "gods" of antiquity (see 1 Corinthians 10:4-6)—makes clear that such matters as whether God exists at all, what such a God is like, and just Who He is, must be settled on the basis of evidence.

In addition, the evidence of inspired writings is sufficient for us to "know the certainty of those things" (Luke 1:4; see also Acts 1:3, 2:36, 9:22, and 13:38).

Though the survey presented here has been brief, it has demonstrated the biblical position on "rational belief." Alexander Campbell described the biblical view of such a belief in *The Christian Baptist*:

> We have learned one lesson of great importance in the pursuit of truth—one that acts as a pioneer to prepare the way of knowledge—one that cannot be adopted and acted upon but the result must be salutary. It is this: **Never to hold any sentiment or proposition as more certain than the evidence on which it rests;** or, in other words, **that our assent to any proposition should be precisely proportioned to the evidence** on which it rests. **All beyond this we esteem enthusiasm**—all short of it incredulity (1827, 1:viii-ix, emp. added).

It should be evident by now that one of the most crucial problems facing God's people today is the wholesale abandonment of the concept of "rational belief."

FIDEISM

“**Belief that**” **and** “**belief in.**” One is not saved merely by learning the truth on a given subject or by accumulating information about it. An individual may examine carefully the evidence for a particular claim (e.g., “the God of the Bible does exist,” “baptism is required in order to obtain forgiveness of sins,” etc.), and then come to believe **that** the claim is true (based on the evidence examined). This alone does not denote “saving faith”; rather, it provides an intellectual foundation of truth without which saving faith would not be possible.

To illustrate, I do not love my wife because I have evidence for her existence. I love her because she possesses certain character traits (among other things I could give as reasons). But it would be foolish to invest a commitment of my love **in** her without believing (and knowing) **that** she really exists. Just so, I love and obey God because He **is** God. But there is no real reason to trust **in** God without believing (on the basis of evidence) that He exists. Belief **that** (see Hebrews 11:6a, John 12:41-42, and James 2:19 for biblical examples; see also the numerous occasions when Christ confronted demons in the New Testament) is the rational foundation upon which belief **in** is based (see Hebrews 11:6b, James 2:20,26, Romans 10:10-17, et al.). Apologetics deals primarily with belief **that**—a belief that forms a basis upon which the commitment of saving faith can be made. In other words, an intellectual vindication of the gospel is the focal point of apologetics. This is so because, in the absence of such a foundation, belief **in** is irrational. One may have a **psychological certitude** (i.e., a strong personal conviction), but this is far removed from **intellectual certainty**. Mark Hanna correctly observed: “If a state of affairs is not as one believes it to be, then he has only certitude, no matter how intense his conviction. Believing something to be the case is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of certainty. Certainty also requires that the state of affairs actually be the case” (1981, p. 80).

If, for example, God does not exist **in fact**, your strong personal convictions (i.e., psychological certitude) will neither bring Him into existence nor alter the fact that He does not exist. It may well be that your personal convictions are impeccable, but the foundation upon which they must be based to be pleasing to God (1 Thessalonians 5:21, 1 John 4:1; et al.) is non-existent. Our ultimate concern, of course, is “saving faith” (belief **in**), but without the foundation of objective truth (which can be known—John 8:32; 6:69; 4:39,41-42), there is no way to prove that a commitment to Christ is any more correct than a commitment to Buddha or Marx. Hence, the work of apologetics is crucial and foundational (see 1 Peter 3:15). Arlie Hoover has noted: “Commitment without reflection is fanaticism, while reflection without commitment is the paralysis of all action. Using Kantian terms, we can say that reason without faith is empty and faith without reason is blind” (1976, p. 37).

“Fideism” defined and explained. In this discussion, I have attempted to contrast various false notions of faith with the biblical concept of faith (which I have termed “rational belief”). Most modern ideas of faith are **fideistic**, since they deny or denigrate the role of reason in Christianity. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines fideism as “the view that truth in religion is ultimately based on faith [by which he means something unproved and unprovable—DS] rather than on reasoning or evidence” (Popkin, 1967, p. 201). “Fideism owes its origin to distrust in human reason, and the logical sequence of such an attitude is skepticism” (Sauvage, 1909, p. 68). Popkin and Stroll have observed:

> The general contention of the fideists has usually been that **religious knowledge is beyond the limits of man’s rational faculties and understanding**.... Fideism represents a combination of a complete skepticism about the possibility of human knowledge, at least in the area of religious knowledge, and an appeal to knowledge through faith, unsupported by rational evidence (1956, p. 111, emp. added).

But, it is my contention that:

> ...before we believe in a proposition as revealed by God, we must first know with certitude [certainty—DS] that God exists, that He reveals such and such a proposition, and that His teaching is worthy of assent, all of which questions can and must be ultimately decided only by an act of intellectual assent based on objective evidence. Thus, fideism not only denies intellectual knowledge, but logically ruins faith itself (Sauvage, 1909, p. 68)

Many religionists today are fideists (which is but a variant of agnosticism), yet do not intend to defend such a concept and generally are unaware that this is not a biblical position. The agnostic says, “I do

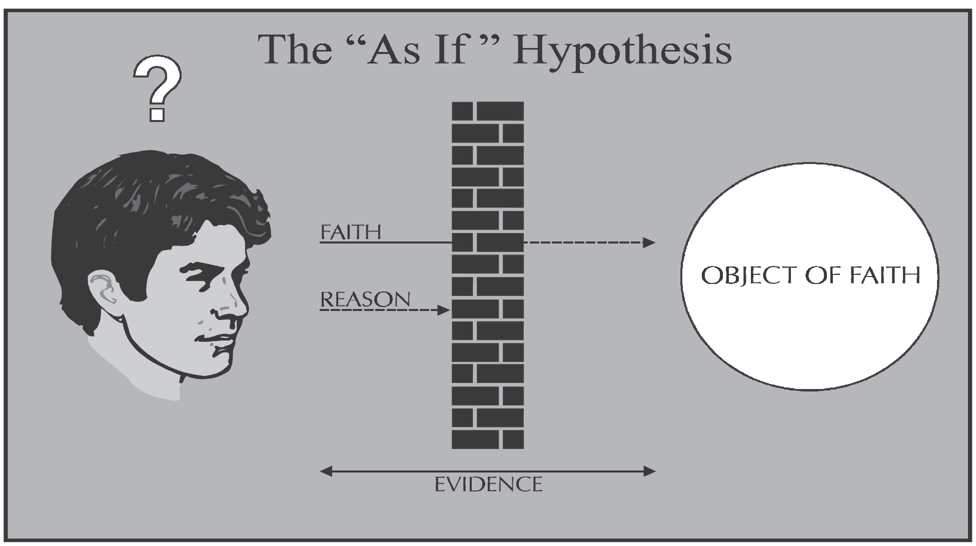
not, and cannot, know whether God exists." The fideist merely adds, "but I accept it by faith." This amounts to a repudiation of the demand for "rational belief" (Isaiah 41:21, 1 Peter 3:15, 1 Thessalonians 5:21; Philippians 1:7; et al.). It also entails the notion of believing for some reason other than on the basis of adequate evidence (e.g., "I believe because I want to believe," "I believe because it gives meaning to my life," etc.). But, as was stated earlier, **any concept of faith that severs it from its objective, epistemological base (i.e., its foundation of knowledge) is at variance with biblical teaching.**

CHAPTER 6

FAITH AND REASON

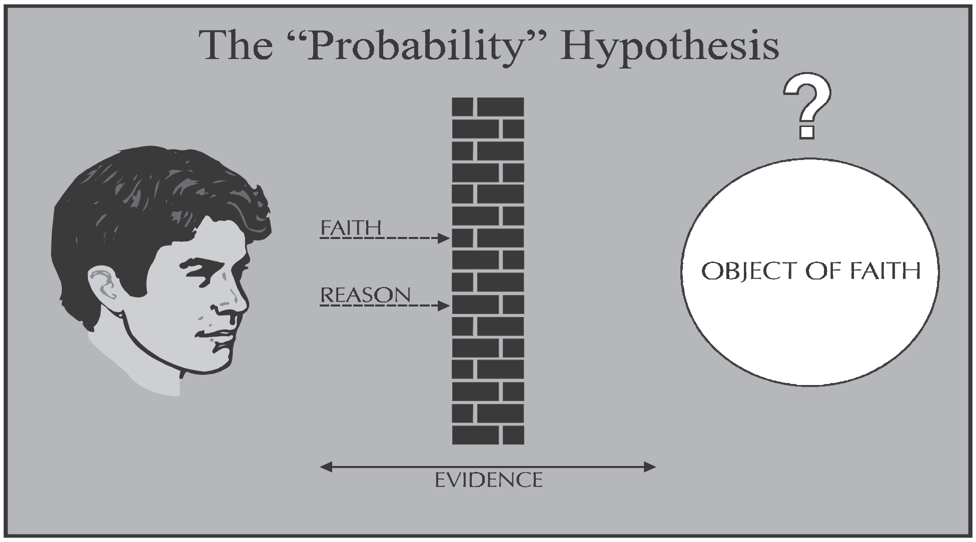
Throughout this discussion, I have adopted the descriptive phrase "rational belief" to depict the teaching of the Bible on the relationship between faith and reason. In this chapter, and the one that follows, I will employ several diagrams to discuss this relationship. Each of the diagrams has an arrow (labeled "evidence") pointing both left and right. This horizontal arrow is intended to suggest that: (1) the same evidence is available to all men; (2) the evidence points to the **object** of faith, not to faith itself; and (3) the evidence informs the intellect of man. The arrow proceeding from the individual depicted in each diagram represents how various thinkers employ the evidence. An unbroken line indicates that the particular thing noted is deemed to be very important to that particular system of thought. A broken line indicates that the particular thing denoted is, in reality, impotent. With these things in mind, let me attempt to portray what the varying positions regarding faith and reason are actually saying. The thesis I wish to maintain in this chapter is that "faith is the volitional commitment of an informed intellect."

1. The "as if" hypothesis. Those holding this position generally maintain that there is no possible way to know whether or not God exists. Thus, in the diagram below, the vertical line represents an impenetrable "wall" that separates the intellect from God. As such, "faith" cannot possibly reach the object of its quest. "Real faith" is **acting as if** there really is an object of faith "out there" somewhere. Since it cannot be maintained that this "faith" is the same as the faith possessed by the apostles, it becomes absurd to speak of restoring apostolic faith and practice.

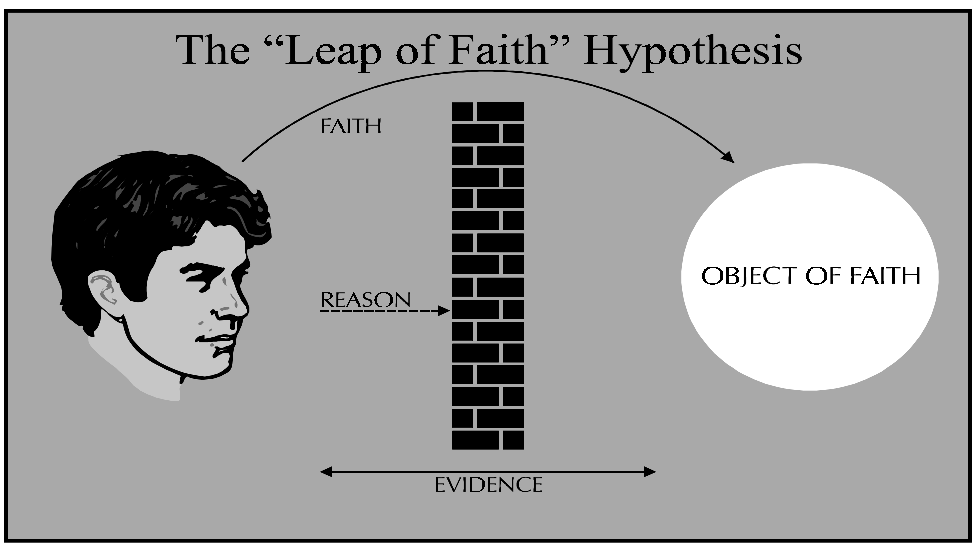


2. The probability hypothesis. At first glance, this view seems to be respectable because it appears non-dogmatic, while still claiming to tip the scales of probability toward theistic belief. Nevertheless, this particular position is more dangerous than any of the others. This is not because the adherents of such a view are insincere, or because they lack psychological commitment to their belief.

In the "as if" hypothesis, the question mark is placed on the subject side, but in this view, the question mark is placed on the object side. That is to say, if the object of faith only "probably" exists, then an impenetrable barrier prevents one from ever reaching the object of faith. After all, given this view, it is just as probable that **nothing** is on the other side of the barrier. At the same time, no action is required of the person holding such a belief (as in acting "as if"). Instead, the emphasis is placed upon the object's probability of existence, whether or not one ever **acts** at all. The only possibility of a worse position would be if one conceived of the "as if" theory having a question mark on **both** sides of the barrier!



3. The "leap of faith" hypothesis. This is a popular view that suggests one go "as far as possible" on evidence, and "the rest of the way" on faith. In this case, "faith" gets all the way to its object. But since "faith" is divorced from knowledge, the person actually operates with a non-biblical definition of the term "faith." Given this view, faith is little more than a volitional commitment (i.e., an act of the will). One may speak of the Christian's "leap of faith" as being "shorter" than the leap of faith required by an atheist, but since knowledge plays no role in such a "leap," neither the Christian nor the atheist really can establish his position as true.



Each of the three positions examined above has in common an explicit rejection of knowledge with reference to the object of faith. If a person claims it is impossible to know whether or not God exists, whether he intends to or not, that person is adopting the same position as the agnostic. The truth of the matter, however, is that Christians are not agnostics! What, then, is the correct position regarding faith and reason?

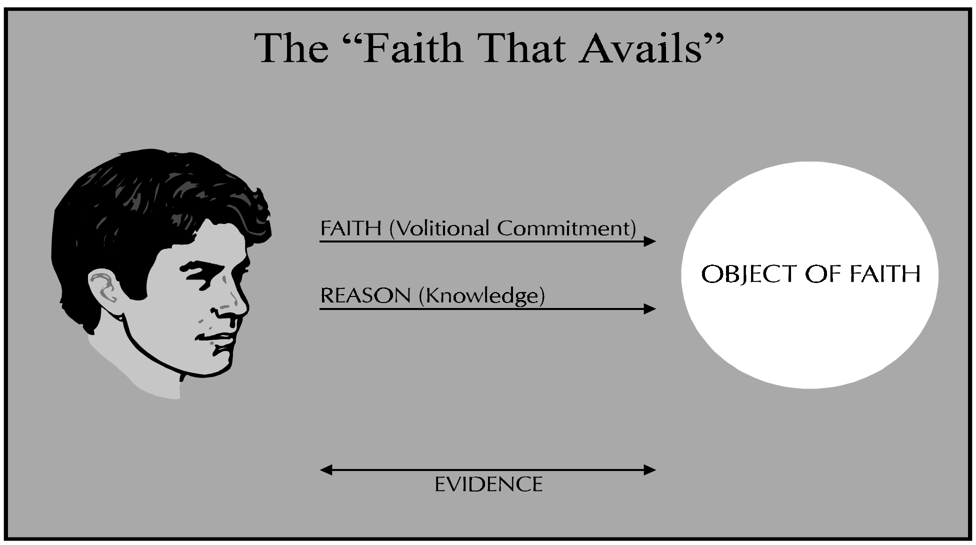
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In contradistinction to the foregoing positions, I would like to advance the concept of **rational belief**. In this view, the object of faith generates evidence (e.g., by credible testimony, cause/effect relationships, direct experience, etc.), which then is examined by the subject. At the same time, the evidence points to the object of faith (whether it be the oneness of the church, the existence of God, the deity of Christ, etc.).

This evidence enlightens the intellect, which then makes a volitional commitment not only possible (i.e., I now know **what** to believe), but also rational (i.e., **I know** what to believe). Thus, **faith is a volitional commitment of an informed intellect**. Knowledge without commitment is disbelief (John 8:30-46; 12:42,43; James 2:19); commitment without knowledge is irrationality. Neither is a genuine option for a Christian. Augustine was correct when he stated:

> For who cannot see that thinking [NOTE: the word translated "thinks," "thinking," etc. throughout this paragraph is the Latin term for reason—DS] is prior to believing? For no one believes anything unless he has first thought that it is to be believed. ...it is...necessary that everything which is believed should be believed after thought has preceded; although even belief is nothing else than to think [i.e., **reason**—DS] with assent.... Everybody who believes, thinks—both thinks in believing, and believes in thinking (Oates, 1980).



This concept may be illustrated by examining several passages of Scripture. First, the Bible makes clear that the same object can be both known and believed, in the same sense and at the same time (see 1 Timothy 4:3, 2 Timothy 1:12, John 4:42, 6:69, 17:8, 1 John 4:6,16, and 5:13). In John 6:69, the perfect tense is used to describe **both** belief **and** knowledge. The perfect tense depicts an action that is completed in the past, but which has results extending into the present. So, a complete translation of the passage would be: "And we have believed and continue to believe (*pepisteukamen*) and have known and continue to know (*egnokamen*) that thou art the Holy One of God."

Second, there are a number of passages documenting that sight, knowledge, and faith are not necessarily separate. For example, consider the text of John 4:39,41-42:

> And from that city many of the Samaritans believed on him because of the word of the woman, who testified, He told me all things that ever I did.... And many more believed because of his word; and they said to the woman, Now we **believe**, not because of thy speaking: for we have **heard** [*akeikoamen*] **for ourselves, and know** [*oidamen*] that this is indeed the Savior of the world.

In both cases there is a **claim** ("Jesus is Savior of the world"), **evidence** to show that the claim is true, and **belief in** the Christ based upon a knowledge of the truth of the claim (see John 8:32 and 17:3). The

woman and the second group of Samaritans came to a knowledge of the truth, which was the basis of their belief, upon conjoining **testimony** with **sight**. The first group believed on the strength of the **testimony** of the woman **without visual evidence**. In both cases, the evidence was sufficient to show that the claim made was true. And in both cases, they **knew** it to be true (cf. John 2:21-22 for another example). In addition to the passages discussed above, consider also John 20:26-31, which clearly teaches that the word was written to produce **belief**, whether by **visual inspection** (as in Thomas' case), or in the **absence** of such (as with you and me). Then recall 1 John 5:13, which indicates that the same word was also written to produce **knowledge**.

Third, one needs to recall Luke 16:31, which states: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." Observe that in this passage, both written evidence and visual inspection (of a person resurrected) would/should produce **belief.** [NOTE: "persuaded" is from *peitho*, a kindred word to *pistis*, which is translated "faith."] Who would deny that each likewise produces **knowledge**?

Furthermore, one's knowledge (or belief) is not compromised, or diminished, in the **absence of sensory perception**. Still further, knowledge is not limited to things that are perceived by the senses. Remember also that Luke informed Theophilus of his (Luke's) investigation and subsequent recording of that information about the Lord (i.e., Luke's written testimony), which would enable Theophilus to "know the certainty of those things wherein (he had been) instructed." Was he ever given information about God's existence, or did he merely assume it? [NOTE: "know the certainty" is from *epiginosko*—literally, "know fully"; "instructed" translates *katecheo*, which refers to a "rigorous and full instruction." Our English word "catechism" comes from this word.] If Theophilus simply assumed God's existence (which then implies that everything else also must be assumed as true in religion, since everything else depends upon God's existence), then are we to believe that he somehow could **know** the certainty of his **assumption**? Would we not rather insist that Theophilus **knew** the truth regarding God, Christ, the church, etc., and that he knew such truth **with certainty**?

Faith is a **volitional commitment of an informed intellect**. It is a joint act of the will and the intellect, not one without the other. Knowledge without commitment is disbelief, and commitment without knowledge is irrationality. This whole issue of the proper relationship between faith and reason is one of the most crucial issues, if not the most crucial issue, facing the church today, for it is foundational in nature. This discussion has been dedicated to exploring the correct relationship between faith and reason—i.e., **rational belief**. May God help us to let truth—not tradition, theory, or theology—be our ultimate guide in this most significant matter.

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